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*Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*. Mana Kia. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. Pp. xxiv + 371

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Books begin with their titles. For me, the first task is to translate the title into Persian. I ask myself, “What do ‘we’ call it in Persian?” For *Persianate Selves*, this is not an easy translation. The adjective “Persianate” delineates a more expansive meaning than the term “Persian,” and no word in the Persian language can stand solidly as an equivalent for it. This comprehensive meaning of Persian is what Mana Kia investigates in this book. Let me explain with a personal example. That I speak of “we Persians” comes from the fact that I was born from Persian parents in Iran and grew up speaking Persian. Based on the understanding of modern nationalism about ethnicity, territory, and language, I call myself a Persian. But was it the case for people before the rise of modern nationalism? Kia’s argument serves to show that it was not. Not everyone who lived in Iran was Persian, nor was Persian ethnicity based only on blood and lineage, nor were “native” Persian speakers the only people considered to be Persian.

Mana Kia reconceptualizes the meaning of origin and place for being Persian by focusing on people who lived in Iran and Hindustan in the eighteenth century. The book’s temporal focus spans between two critical events: the fall of Safavid in 1722 and the production of Macaulay’s famous memorandum “Minute Upon Indian Education” in 1835. The former is critical because it defined the shared meaning of place and origin and brought about the construction of our modern idea of Iran, while the latter is critical since it abolished Persian as the language of power in the subcontinent and thus transformed those shared meanings (20).

To represent particular cultural and social aspects of Iran and Hindustan's specific eras, Kia has thoughtfully selected her archival resources from three intertwined generations. She called them commemorative texts. For accessing the memoirs of Safavid times, Kia singled out authors such as Muhammad 'Alī Hazīn Lāhījī (d. 1766 CE/1180 AH) and Vālih Dāghistānī (d. 1756/1169) as the first generation. For the next generation and for accessing accounts about Nadir Shah's era, she mostly focused on the works of Lutf 'Alī Āzar Baygdilī (d. 1780/1195) and 'Abd al-Karīm Kashmīrī (d. 1784/1198). And for the third generation and for accessing memoirs of those who fled the Iranian domain after the fall of Safavid, she picked scholars such as 'Abu Ṭalib Khan Isfahanī (d. 1806/1220) and 'Abd al-Laṭīf Shushtarī (d. 1806/1220).

These *adibs*, as the exemplar of people from different geographical places and lineages, are all Persians, according to Kia. She argues that their geographical places constituted their lineage, but only as one part of it. Other types of places, such as ancestral homeland, site of study, or professional location, were more significant (104). Kia sees the diversity between these different groups of people as not categorical but more aporetic (as Derrida formulates it). Instead of focusing on what elements were making the Persian self, she focuses on how these elements were doing so.

The key for Kia is *adab*. It is through Persianate *adab* that lineage, place, and language gained meaning for people to identify themselves as Persians. *Adab* is how Persians identify themselves. Kia applies *adab* in different yet coherent ways throughout the book; all contribute to the fully functioning nature of the term *adab*. She defines *adab* as the proper aesthetic and ethical forms of thinking, acting, and speaking, such that perceiving, desiring, and experiencing *adab* provides the coherent logic of being Persian. Through *adab*, space turns into place, and place obtains a moral

meaning (96). It is also through *adab* that relations between selves and collectives become intelligible, lineage is understood, and language is used (100–102). *Adab* regulates an understanding of kinship distinct from blood and situates Persians ontologically in a world of relationships (200).

Although the multifarious arguments of *Persianate Selves* are chiefly serving the idea of being Persian, the book also offers a novel approach to Persian biographical literature (*tazkira*). Kia traces a conventional method/structure of remembering the past between the authors of commemorative texts. These texts were supposed to tell a story of worthy lives. Still, the very act of the author's selecting and narrating was meaningful, as it was a means of affiliation, allowing the author to identify themselves. Biographers represent certain pasts and certain individuals in a specific way within which their lineages and social relationships are nested.

Given the book's scope, Kia has managed to develop and justify her argument and excellently reincarnate the term *adab*. Throughout the book, she introduces some new terms and resurrects many others (e.g., Turan and Hindustan), all aligned with her idea of "naming" offered in Chapter 6. All in all, Kia's novel insights and approaches locate the *Persianate Selves* among the books that will stay *mana* (endure) in the field of Persianate Studies.